

## A summary John 3:22-36

- 1. John the Baptist's ministry:** Jesus's speaking concerning the need to be born again (or born above) concludes in 3:21. Immediately after His speaking, there is a reaction: people begin to be baptized, both by Jesus (v. 22) and by John the Baptist (v. 23). John the Baptist continues to fulfill the ministry that was prophesied in the Old Testament, that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah (cf Malachi 4:5-6, Luke 1:17), and Jesus Himself recognizes that John was indeed Elijah who had already come (Matthew 17:12). Therefore, John was ordained by the Triune God to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ, to fulfill his special portion. In fulfilling his ministry, John gained disciples, referred to as "his disciples." We may look at John's ministry as competing with Jesus's ministry, and wonder why John did not hand over all his disciples to Jesus and discontinue his work. Jesus, however, did not look at John's ministry as a rival ministry, but thoroughly honored him in keeping with God's ordination and calling. John, in turn, honored and exalted Jesus, acknowledging that he (John) was not Christ, but the friend of the bridegroom, and that he must decrease but Christ must increase. He confessed that his function was to hear the voice of the Bridegroom and rejoice (3:29), and that all his labor in baptizing people was to cause them to become the bride uniquely for the purpose and satisfaction of the Bridegroom. Earlier in chapter 1, he had again emphasized that he was not the Christ, but merely a voice of one crying in the wilderness. John was very pure in his serving. Are we pure in our serving? When we serve well and effectively, we will have disciples, in principle. Even Paul the apostle had disciples (Acts 9:25). People will look to us and depend on us, and even follow the Lord because of us. Eventually, are we willing to lead them to Christ alone, where they, in a sense, cease to be "our" disciples and become disciples of Christ? Whether we are there or not, they continue to follow Christ. They follow Christ not just because of us, but because they themselves have received a revelation and have come face to face with Christ. Are we willing to decrease, and for Christ's life to increase in us, and consequently in those that we accompany?
- 2. Being sent to speak the word (rhema) of God:** John was sent to speak the words of God (3:34). The Greek word for "sent" has the meaning of being sent out on a mission, or ordered (as in the military). This is similar also to 3:17 where God sent the Son. The same Greek word is also used in Luke 10:1 when Jesus sent His seventy disciples two by two to preach the gospel. He whom God sent in John 3:34 may not only refer to John the Baptist but also to Jesus, the Son. Therefore, God sent John the Baptist, God sent His Son, and Jesus sent His disciples, and sends us now, on a mission, by order, to speak the rhema word of God, that is the word that we have experienced and that has gone through us, not just the black and white letter of knowledge, not just the Bible words, but the experience, especially as related to our church life and the testimony of the Lord. Jesus' speaking was actually mostly rhema, that is, the *logos* (constant word) that He had experienced and applied to the lives of the disciples. Whenever He quoted the Old Testament (the *logos*), He immediately followed up with rhema speaking (e.g. Matthew 4:4).
- 3. We need to be the "friend of the bridegroom":** John the Baptist was the friend of the Bridegroom. The Greek word for friend has the thought of close associate or companion, with the notion of affection or fondness. He was intimate with Jesus, just like Moses was a friend of God, with whom God spoke face to face (see Exodus 33:11). We also need to be so close to the Lord, like Moses. We need to speak to Him, not just as the Lord, but also as a close friend, to tell Him everything, and to hold nothing back. As a friend, He must increase, and we must decrease.
- 4. We need to grow to become His bride:** To be the friend of the bridegroom is not enough. We need to grow to become His bride. This means that the life of Christ must increase in us to the point where we become one with Christ, as a husband is one with his wife and vice-versa (see Ephesians 5:23-32). Thus, the friend of the Bridegroom becomes the bride of Christ by the eternal life of Christ increasing in us to become the eternal portion of the bride.
- 5. A deeper significance of baptism:** Baptism in the Bible is often associated with repentance and the forgiveness of sins (see Acts 2:38). However, baptism, or being born of water (John 3:5), signifies much more than repentance. Why can we say this? Firstly, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. In a sense, Jesus had no need to be baptized because he had no sin. He was perfect and sinless. Even John recognized this and was shocked that Jesus should come to him to be baptized (Matthew 3:14). Why then was Jesus baptized? As a man, Jesus took on the flesh (John 1:14). In the Bible, "flesh" signifies the fallen world. Jesus was by no means fallen, but He was born of the "seed of David" (Romans 1:3), partaking of blood and flesh (Hebrews 2:14). That very nature, His sinless humanity, needed to go through the process of death and resurrection to be uplifted into divinity, not because of sin, but to bring humanity into divinity, to be fully one with God. This process is typified by Adam being put to sleep by God in order for Eve to be formed (Genesis 2:21), before sin had entered. Adam, a type of Christ here, before the fall, was put to sleep (symbolically put to death) and his side was opened so his counterpart (Eve) could be produced. In the same way, when Christ was crucified, His side was pierced and blood and water flowed out (John 19:34), in order to produce His bride, the church. Therefore, baptism is much more than our being terminated and having our sins dealt with. It also signifies our union with Christ in life and living, where we become His bride to match Him in every aspect. This realization of baptism may elevate our church life from merely living a "good" or "righteous" life to living a life full of revelation, purpose and operation, where we realize that we are living in resurrection with Christ, operating with Him and furthering His testimony.